

Untouchables or The Children of India's Ghetto

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UNTOUCHABLES OR THE CHILDREN OF INDIA'S GHETTO

(This is a 208-page MS (Second copy) under the title " Untouchables or The Children of India's Ghetto ". The whole MS forms an independent book by itself. It has a ' Table of Contents ' divided into 4 parts, which are further sub-divided into 14 chapters. Slight modifications had to be made in the arrangement of the chapters to bring them in conformity with that of ' Table of Contents '. Except few corrections in the titles of the chapters, the text is untouched by the author.)

PART I

What it is to be an Untouchable .

CHAPTER I

UNTOUCHABILITY—ITS SOURCE

It is usual to hear all those who feel moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables unburden themselves by uttering the cry "We must do something for the Untouchables". One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying ' Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu '. It is invariably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the Untouchables. If there is to be a Mission, it must be to the Untouchables and if the Untouchables can be cured, untouchability will vanish. Nothing requires to be done to the Touchable. He is sound in mind, manners and morals. He is whole, there is nothing wrong with him. Is this assumption correct ? Whether correct or not, the Hindus like to cling to it. The assumption has the supreme merit of satisfying themselves that they are not responsible for the problem of the Untouchables.

How natural is such an attitude is illustrated by the attitude of the Gentile towards the Jews. Like the Hindus the Gentiles also do not admit that the Jewish problem is in essence a Gentile problem. The observations of Louis Goulding on the subject are therefore very illuminating. In order to show how the Jewish problem is in its essence a Gentile problem, he says:

" I beg leave to give a very homely instance of the sense in which I consider the Jewish Problem in essence a Gentile Problem. A close acquaintance of mine is a certain Irish terrier of mixed pedigree, the dog Paddy, who is to my friend John Smith as the apple of both his eyes. Paddy dislikes Scotch terriers; it is enough for one to pass within twenty yards of Paddy to deafen the neighbourhood with challenges and insults. It is a practice which John Smith deplures, which, therefore, he does his best to check—all the more as the objects of Paddy's detestation are often inoffensive creatures, who seldom speak first. Despite all his affection for Paddy, he considers, as I do, that Paddy's unmannerly behaviour is due to some measure of original sin in Paddy. It has not yet been suggested to us that what is here involved is a Scotch Terrier Problem and that when Paddy attacks a neighbour who is peacefully engaged in inspecting the evening smells it is the neighbour who should be arraigned for inciting to attack by the fact of his existence."

There is here a complete analogy between the Jewish Problem and the problem of the Untouchables. What Paddy is to the Scotch Terrier, the Gentile is to the Jews, and the Hindu is to the Untouchables. But there is one aspect in which the Jewish Problem stands in contrast to the Gentile Problem. The Jews and the Gentiles are separated by an antagonism of the creeds. The Jewish creed is opposed to that of the Gentile creed. The Hindus and the Untouchables are not separated by any such antagonism. They have a

common creed and observe the same cults.

The second explanation is that the Jews wish to remain separate from the Gentiles. While the first explanation is chauvinistic the second seems to be founded on historical truth. Many attempts have been made in the past by the Gentiles to assimilate the Jews. But the Jews have always resisted them. Two instances of this may be referred.

The first instance relates to the Napoleonic regime. After the National Assembly of France had agreed to the declaration of the ' Rights of man ' to the Jews, the Jewish question was again reopened by the guild merchants and religious reactionaries of Alsace. Napoleon resolved to submit the question to the consideration of the Jews themselves. He convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables of France, Germany and Italy in order to ascertain whether the principles of Judaism were compatible with the requirements of citizenship as he wished to fuse the Jewish element with the dominant population. The Assembly consisting of 111 deputies, met in the Town Hall of Paris on the 25th of July 1806, and was required to frame replies to twelve questions relating mainly to the possibility of Jewish patriotism, the permissibility of inter-marriage between Jew and Non-Jew, and the legality of usury. So pleased was Napoleon with the pronouncements of the Assembly that he summoned a Sanhedrin after the model of the ancient council of Jerusalem to convert them into the decree of a Legislative body. The Sanhedrin, comprising of 71 deputies from France, Germany, Holland and Italy met under the presidency of Rabbi Sinzheim, of Strassburg on 9th February 1807, and adopted a sort of Charter which exhorted the Jews to look upon France as their fatherland, to regard its citizens as their brethren, and to speak its language, and which also pressed toleration of marriages between Jews and Christians while declaring that they could not be sanctioned by the synagogue. It will be noted that the Jews refused to sanction intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews. They only agreed to tolerate them.

The second instance relates to what happened when the Batavian Republic was established in 1795. The more energetic members of the Jewish community pressed for a removal of the many disabilities under which they laboured. But the demand for the fuller rights of citizenship made by the progressive Jews was at first, strangely enough, opposed by the leaders of the Amsterdam community, who feared that civil equality would militate against the conservation of Judaism and declared that their co-religionists renounced their rights of citizenship in obedience to the dictates of their faith. This shows that the Jews preferred to live- as strangers rather than as members of the community.

Whatever the value of their explanations the Gentiles have at least realized that there rests upon them a responsibility to show cause for their unnatural attitude towards the Jews. The Hindu has never realised this responsibility of justifying his treatment of the Untouchables. The responsibility of the Hindus is much greater because there is no plausible explanation he can offer in justification of untouchability. He cannot say that the Untouchable is a leper or a mortal wretch who must be shunned. He cannot say that between him and the Untouchables, there is a gulf due to religious antagonism which is not possible to bridge. Nor can he plead that it is the Untouchable who does not wish to assimilate with the Hindus.

But that is not the case with the Untouchables. They too are in a different sense an eternal people who are separate from the rest. But this separateness, their segregation is not the result of their wish. They are punished not because they do not want to mix. They are punished because they want to be one with the Hindus. In other words, though the problem of the Jews and of the Untouchables is similar in nature— inasmuch as the problem is created by others—it is essentially different. The Jew's case is one of the voluntary isolation. The case of the Untouchables is that of compulsory segregation. Untouchability is an infliction and not a choice.

CHAPTER 2

UNTOUCHABLES—THEIR NUMBERS

Before one tries to know what it is to be an Untouchable one would like to know what is the total population of the Untouchables of India. For this one must go to the Census Report.

The first general census of India was taken in the year 1881. Beyond listing the different castes and creeds and adding up their numbers so as to arrive at the total figure of the population of India the Census of 1881 did nothing. It made no attempt to classify the different Hindu castes either into higher and lower or touchable and untouchable. The second general census of India was taken in the year 1891. It was at this census that an attempt to classify the population on the basis of caste and race and grade was made by the Census Commissioner for the first time. But it was only an attempt.

The third general census of India was taken in 1901. At this census a new principle of classification was adopted namely " Classification by Social precedence as recognised by native public opinion". To this serious opposition was raised by high caste Hindus to the enumeration by caste in the Census Report. They insisted on the omission of the question regarding caste.

This objection did not have any effect on the Census Commissioner. In the opinion of the Census Commissioner enumeration by caste was important and necessary. It was argued by the Census Commissioner that " whatever view may be taken of the advantages or disadvantages of caste as a social institution, it is impossible to conceive of any useful discussion of the population questions in India in which caste would not be an important element. Caste is still 'the foundation of the Indian social fabric' and the record of caste is still 'the best guide to the changes in the various social strata in the Indian Society' Every Hindu (using the term in its most elastic sense) is born into a caste and his caste determines his religious, social, economic and domestic life from the cradle to the grave. In western countries the major factors which determine the different strata of society viz. wealth, education and vocation are fluid and catholic and tend to modify the rigidity of birth and hereditary position. In India spiritual and social community and traditional occupation override all other factors. Thus where in censuses of western countries an economic or occupational grouping of the population affords a basis for the combination of demographic statistics, the corresponding basis in the case of the Indian population is the distinction of religion and caste. Whatever view may be taken of caste as a national and social institution it is useless to ignore it, and so long as caste continues to be used as one of the distinguishing features of an individual's official and social identity it cannot be claimed that a decennial enumeration helps to perpetuate an undesirable institution.

This Census of 1901 did not result in fixing the total population of the Untouchables at any exact figure. This was due to two reasons. In the first place no exact tests were applied to determine who is an Untouchable. Secondly a class of the population which was economically and educationally backward but not Untouchable was mixed up with those who were actually Untouchables.

The Census of 1911 went a step further and actually laid down ten tests to mark off the Untouchables from those who were Touchable. Under these tests the Census Superintendents made a separate enumeration of castes and tribes who (1) denied the supremacy of the Brahmins; (2) did not receive the Mantra from Brahmana or other recognised Hindu Guru; (3) denied the authority of the Vedas; (4) did not worship the great Hindu Gods; (5) were not served by good Brahmanas; (6) have no Brahmin priests at all; (7) have no access to the interior of the ordinary Hindu temple; (8) cause pollution; (9) bury their dead and (10) eat beef and do not reverence the cow. The separation of the Untouchables from the Hindus was insisted upon by the Muslims in a memorial to the Government dated 27th January 1910 in which

they claimed that their representation in the political bodies of the country should be in proportion to the population of Touchable Hindus and not Hindus as a whole because they contended that the Untouchables were not Hindus.

Be that as it may the Census of 1911 marks the beginning of the ascertainment of the population of the Untouchables. Efforts in the same direction were continued at the Census of 1921 and 1931.

As a result of these efforts the Simon Commission which came to India in 1930 was able to state with some degree of surety that total population of Untouchables in British India was 44.5 millions.

Suddenly, however, in 1932 when the Lothian Committee came to India to investigate the question of franchise for the reformed Legislatures and began its investigation, the Hindus adopted a challenging mood and refused to accept the figure given by the Simon Committee as a true figure of the Untouchables of India. In some provinces the Hindus went to the length of denying that there were any Untouchables at all. This is due to the fact that the Hindus had by now realised the danger of admitting the existence of the Untouchables. For it meant that a part of the representation enjoyed by the Hindus will have to be given up by them to the Untouchables.

The Census of 1941 must be left out of consideration. It was taken during the war and it was a sort of a rough measure.

The latest Census is that of 1951. The following figures are taken from the statement issued by the Census Commissioner. The Census Commissioner gives the population of the Scheduled Castes in India as 513 lakhs.

The total population of India, as shown by the 1951 census is 3,567 lakhs, excluding 1.35 lakhs, the enumeration records in whose case were destroyed by fire in the Census Tabulation Office at Jullundur.

Out of the total population of 3,567 lakhs, 2,949 lakhs live in rural areas and 618 lakhs in the urban areas. The Scheduled Castes in rural areas total 462 lakhs and in urban areas their figures are 51 lakhs.

Non-agricultural classes for the whole population total 1,076 lakhs, the Scheduled Castes 132 lakhs.

Cultivators of land, wholly or mainly owned, and their dependants total 1,674 lakhs for the whole population, 174 lakhs for the Scheduled Castes.

Cultivators of land, wholly or mainly un-owned and their dependants are 316 lakhs for the whole of India, 56 lakhs for the Scheduled Castes.

Cultivating labourers and their dependants are 448 lakhs for the whole of India, 148 lakhs for the Scheduled Castes. Figures for non-agricultural classes are as follows:

Production other than Cultivation: Total 377 lakhs. Scheduled Castes 53 lakhs.

Commerce: Total 213 lakhs. Scheduled Castes 9 lakhs. Transport: Total 56 lakhs. Scheduled Castes 6 lakhs. Other services and miscellaneous sources: Total 430 lakhs, Scheduled Castes 64 lakhs.

Out of a total Scheduled Caste population of over 513 lakhs, 114 lakhs live in North India (Uttar Pradesh); 128 lakhs in East India (Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Tripura); 110 lakhs in South India (Madras, Mysore, Travancore-Cochin and Coorg); 31 lakhs in West India (Bombay, Saurashtra and Kutch); 76 lakhs in Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Hyderabad, Bhopal and Vindhya Pradesh); and 52 lakhs in North-West India (Rajasthan, Punjab, Patiala and East Punjab States Union, Ajmer, Delhi, Bilaspur and Himachal Pradesh).

CHAPTER 3 SLAVES AND UNTOUCHABLES

Far from being ashamed of untouchability, the Hindus try to defend it. The line of their defence is that the Hindus have never upheld slavery as other nations have done and that in any case, untouchability is not worse than slavery. This argument was used by no less a person than the late Lala Lajpat Rai in his book called ' Unhappy India '. It would have been unnecessary to waste one's time in refuting this countercharge had it not been that on account of its plausibility the world at large not having witnessed anything worse than slavery is likely to believe that untouchability cannot be worse than slavery.

The first reply to the counter-charge is that it is quite untrue that slavery was not recognised by the Hindus. Slavery is a very ancient institution of the Hindus. It is recognised by Manu, the Hindu lawgiver and has been elaborated and systematised by the other Smriti writers who followed Manu. Slavery among the Hindus was never merely ancient institution, which functioned, only in some hoary past. It was an institution which continued throughout Indian history down to the year 1843 and if it had not been abolished by the British Government by law in that year, it might have continued even today.

As to the relative merits of slavery and untouchability, the best way to meet the counter-charge is to compare and contrast untouchability with slavery as it existed in ancient Rome and in modern America.

What was the *de facto* condition of the slaves in the Roman Empire? The best description I know of is to be found in Mr. Barrow's *Slavery in the Roman Empire*. Says Mr. Barrow:

" Hitherto, it is the repulsive side of household slavery that has been sketched. There is also another aspect. The literature reveals the vast household as normal. It is, of course, the exception. Large slave staffs undoubtedly existed, and they are generally to be found in Rome. In Italy and the Provinces there was less need of display; many of the staff of the Villa were engaged in productive work connected with land and its produce. The old-fashioned relationship between foreman and slave remained there; the slave was often a fellow worker. The kindness of Pliny towards his staff is well known. It is in no spirit of self-righteousness, and in no wish to appear in a favourable light in the eyes of the future generations which he hoped would read his letters that he tells of his distress at the illness and death of his slaves. The household (or Pliny) is the slaves' republic. Pliny's account of his treatment of his slaves is sometimes regarded as so much in advance of general or even occasional practice as to be valueless as evidence. There is no reason for this attitude.

From reasons both of display and genuine literary interest, the rich families attached to their households, slaves trained in literature and art. Clavicles Sabinus is said by Seneca to have had eleven slaves taught to recite Homer, Hesiod, and nine lyric poets by heart. ' Book cases would be cheaper ', said a rude friend. ' No, what the household knows the master knows ' was the answer. But, apart from such abuses, educated slaves must have been a necessity in the absence of printing;.. .. The busy lawyer, the dilettante poet, the philosopher and educated gentlemen of literary tastes and need of copyists and readers and secretaries. Such men were naturally linguistic also; a *librarius* who dies at the age of twenty boasts that he was ' *litteratus Graecis Latinis* '. *Amanuenses* were common enough; librarians are to be found in public and private libraries.... Shorthand writing was in common use under the Empire, and slave *Notarii* were regularly employed. Many freemen, rhetoricians and grammarians are collected by Suetonius in a special treatise. Verrius Flaccus was tutor to Augustus's grandsons, and at death was publicly honoured by a statue. Scribonius Aphrodisius was the slave and disciple of Orbilius and was afterwards freed by Scribonia. Hyginus was librarian of the Palatine Library, in which office he was followed by Julius Modestus, his own freeman. We hear of freemen historians of a slave philosopher who was encouraged to argue with his master, friends of slaves and freed architects. Freemen as doctors occur frequently in the inscriptions, some of them specialists, they had been trained in big households as slaves, as is shown by one or two examples; after Manumission they rose to eminence and became notorious for their high fees." The tastes of some section of society demanded that dancer, singers, musicians, mountebanks, variety artists,

athletic trainers and messieurs should be forthcoming. All these are to be found in slavery often trained by teachers who had acquired some reputation¹.'

The age of Augustus was the beginning of a period of commercial and industrial expansion.... Slaves had indeed been employed (in arts and crafts) before, but the sudden growth of trade.... their employment in numbers that would otherwise have been unnecessary. Romans engaged more freely and more openly in various forms of commercial and industrial venture. Yet, even so, the agent became more important, for commercial activities became more widespread; and such agents were almost necessarily slaves.... (this is so) because the bonds of slavery (are elastic). (They could be) so relaxed as to offer an incentive to the slave to work by the prospect of wealth and freedom, and so tightened as to provide a guarantee to the master against loss from the misconduct of his slave. In business contracts between slave and master or third person seem to have been common, and the work thus done, and no doubt, the profits were considerable.... Renting of land to the slave has already been noticed.... and in industry much the same system was used in various forms; the master might lease a bank, or a business of the use of a ship, the terms being a fixed return or the slave being paid on a commission basis'.

The earnings of the slave became in law his peculium was saved it might be used to a variety of purpose. No doubt in many cases this fund was expended in providing food or pleasure. But peculium must not be regarded merely as petty savings, casually earned and idly spent. The slave who made his master's business yield profits, to his own profit too, very often, had a keen sense of the best use to make up his own money. Often he reinvested it in his master's business or in enterprises entirely unrelated to it. He could enter into business relations with his master, from whom he came to be regarded as entirely distinct, or he could make contracts with a third person. He could even have procurators to manage his own property and interests. And so with the peculium may be found not only land, houses, shops, but rights and claims.

The activities of slaves in commerce are innumerable; numbers of them are shopkeepers selling every variety of food, bread, meat, salt, fish, wine, vegetables, beans, lupine-seed, honey, curd, ham, ducks and fresh fish; others deal in clothing— sandals, shoes, gowns and mantles. In Rome, they plied their trade in the neighbourhood of the Circus Mamimus, or the Porticus Trigemimus; or the Esquiline Market, or the Great Mart (on the Caolian Hill) or the Suburra....

The extent to which slave secretaries and agents acted for their masters is shown very clearly in the receipts found in the house of Caecilius Jucundus at Pompei .

That the State should possess slaves is not surprising; war, after all, was the affair of the State and the captive might well be State-property. What is surprising is the remarkable use made of public slaves under the Empire and the extraordinary social position occupied by them....

" ' Public slave ' came to mean before the Empire a slave of the State employed in its many offices, and the term implied a given occupation and often social position. The work of slaves of the State, slaves of the townships, and slaves of Caesar comprises much of what would now fall to parts of the higher and the whole of the lower branches of the civil services and of the servants of Municipal Corporations, working both with head and hands.... In the subordinate levels (of the Treasury) there worked numbers of clerks and financial officers, all freedmen and slaves. The business dealt with must have been of vast range.... The Mint.. .. the immediate head was a knight, in charge of the minting processes.... a freedman was placed; under him served freedmen and slaves.... From one branch of State service, at any rate, slaves were rigorously excluded, except on one or two occasions of exceptional stress. They were not allowed to fight in the Army because not thought worthy of honour. Doubtless other motives were present also; it would be dangerous experiment to train too many slaves systematically in the use of Arms. If, however, slaves served rarely in the fighting line, they are regularly to be found in great numbers behind it employed as servants, and in the commissariat and transport. In the fleet slaves were common enough."

II

Let us turn to the *de facto* position of the Negro in the United States during the period in which he was slave in the eye of the law. Here are some facts which shed a good deal of light on his position:

" Lafayette himself had observed that white and black seamen and soldiers had fought and messed together in the Revolution without bitter difference. Down in Granville County, North Carolina, a full blooded Negro, John Chavis, educated in Princeton University, was conducting a private school for white students and was a licentiate under the local Presbytery, preaching to white congregations in the State. One of his pupils became Governor of North Carolina, another the State's most prominent Whig senator. Two of his pupils were sons of the Chief Justice of North Carolina. The father of the founder of the greatest military Academy of the State attended his school and boarded in his home Slave labour was used for all kinds of work and the more

intelligent of the Negro slaves were trained as artisans to be used and leased. Slave artisans would bring twice as much as an ordinary field hand in the market. Master craftsmen owned their staff. Some masters, as the system became more involved, hired slaves to their slave artisans. Many slave artisans purchased their freedom by the savings allowed them above the normal labour expected."

" The advertisements for runaways and sales are an index to this skill. They received the same or better wages than the poor white labourer and with the influence of the master got the best jobs. The Contractors for masons' and carpenters' work in Athens, Georgia in 1838 were petitioned to stop showing preference to Negro labourers. " The white man is the only real, legal, moral, and civil proprietor of this country and state. The right of his proprietorship reached from the date of the studies of those whitemen, Copernicus and Galileo, who indicated the sphericity of the earth; which sphericity hinted to another white man, Columbus, the possibility by a westerly course of sailing, of finding land. Hence by whitemen alone was this continent discovered, the whitemen alone, aye, those to whom you decline to give money for bread or clothes for their famishing families, in the logical manner of withholding work from them defending Negroes too in the bargain." In Atlanta in 1858 a petition signed by 2 white mechanics and labourers sought protection against the black slave artisans of masters who resided in other sections. The very next year sundry white citizens were aggrieved that the City Council tolerated a Negro dentist to remain and operate in their midst. ' In justice to ourselves and the community it ought to be abated. We, the residents of Atlanta, appeal to you for justice '. A Census of free Negroes in Richmond County, Georgia, in 1819 showed carpenters, barbers, boatcorkers, saddlers, spinners, millwrights, holsters, weavers, harness makers, sawmill attendants and steamboat pilots. A Negro shoe-maker made by hand the boots in which President Munrow was inaugurated. Harriet Martineau marvelled at the slave workmanship in the delicately tiled floors of Thomas Jefferson's home at Monticello. There still stands in the big house of the old plantation, heavy marks of the hands of these Negro craftsmen, strong mansions built of timber hewn from the original oak and pinned together by wooden pins. Negro women skilled in spinning and weaving worked in the mills. Buckingham in 1839 found them in Athens, Georgia, working alongside with white girls without apparent repugnance or objection. Negro craftsmen in the South, slave and free fared better than their brothers in the North. In 1856 in Philadelphia, of 1637 Negro craftsmen recorded, less than two-thirds could use their trades; 'because of hostile prejudice '. The Irish who were pouring into America from the very beginning of the nineteenth century were being

used in the North on approximately the same motives of preference, which governed Negro slavery. ' An Irish Catholic, it was argued in their favour, seldom attempts to rise to a higher condition than that in which he is placed, while the Negro often makes the attempt with success. Had not the old Puritan Oliver Cromwell, while the traffic in black slaves was on, sold all the Irish not killed in the Drogheda Massacre, into Barbados? Free and fugitive Negroes in New York and Pennsylvania were in constant conflict with this group and the bitter hostility showed itself most violently in the draft riots of the New York. These Hibernians controlled the hod carrying and the common labour jobs, opposing every approach of the Negro as a menace to their slight hold upon America and upon a means of livelihood."

III

Such was the *de facto* condition of the Roman slave and the American Negro slave. Is there anything in the condition of the Untouchables of India which is comparable with the condition of the Roman slave and the American Negro slave? It would not be unfair to take the same period of time for comparing the condition of the Untouchables with that of the slaves under the Roman Empire. But I am prepared to allow the comparison of the condition of the slaves in the Roman Empire to be made with the condition of the Untouchables of the present day. It is a comparison between the worst of one side and the best of the other, for the present times are supposed to be the golden age for the Untouchables. How does the *de facto* condition of the Untouchables compare with the *de facto* condition of the slaves? How many Untouchables are engaged as the slaves in Rome were, in professions such as those of Librarians, Amanuenses, Shorthand writers? How many Untouchables are engaged, as the slaves in Rome were, in such intellectual occupations as those of rhetoricians, grammarians, philosophers, tutors, doctors and artists? How many Untouchables are engaged, as the slaves in Rome? Can any Hindu dare to give an affirmative answer to anyone of these queries? The Untouchables are completely shut out from any of these avenues in which the slaves found so large a place. This proves how futile is the line of defence adopted by the Hindus to justify untouchability. The pity of the matter is that most people condemn slavery simply because they hold that for one man or class to have by law the power of life and death over another is wrong. They forget that there can be cruel oppression, tyranny, and persecution, with the train of misery, disappointment and desperation even when there is no slavery. Those who will take note of the facts stated above relating to the *de facto* condition of the slaves will admit that it is idle to

condemn slavery lightly or hurriedly on the mere *de jure* conception of it. What the law permits is not always evidence of the practices prevalent in society. Many a slave would readily have admitted that they owed everything to slavery, and many did so whether they would have admitted it or not.

Slavery, it must be admitted, is not a free social order. But can untouchability be described as a free social order? The Hindus who came forward to defend untouchability no doubt claim that it is. They, however, forget that there are differences between untouchability and slavery, which makes untouchability a worse type of an un-free social order. Slavery was never obligatory. But untouchability is obligatory. A person is *permitted* to hold another as his slave. There is no compulsion on him if he does not want to. But an Untouchable has no option. Once he is born an Untouchable, he is subject to all the disabilities of an Untouchable. The law of slavery permitted emancipation. Once a slave always a slave was not the fate of the slave. In untouchability there is no escape. Once an Untouchable always an Untouchable. The other difference is that untouchability is an indirect and therefore the worst form of slavery. A deprivation of a man's freedom by an open and direct way is a preferable form of enslavement. It makes the slave conscious of his enslavement and to become conscious of slavery is the first and most important step in the battle for freedom. But if a man is deprived of his liberty indirectly he has no consciousness of his enslavement. Untouchability is an indirect form of slavery. To tell an Untouchable 'you are free, you are a citizen, you have all the rights of a citizen ', and to tighten the rope in such a way as to leave him no opportunity to realise the ideal is a cruel deception. It is enslavement without making the Untouchables conscious of their enslavement. It is slavery though it is untouchability. It is real though it is indirect. It is enduring because it is unconscious. Of the two orders, untouchability is beyond doubt the worse.

Neither slavery nor untouchability is a free social order. But if a distinction is to be made—and there is no doubt that there is distinction between the two—the test is whether education, virtue, happiness, culture, and wealth is possible within slavery or within untouchability. Judged by this test it is beyond controversy that slavery is hundred times better than untouchability. In slavery there is room for education, virtue, happiness, culture, or wealth. In untouchability there is none. Untouchability has none of the advantages of an un-free social order such as slavery. It has all the disadvantages of a free social order. In an un-free social order such as slavery there is the advantage of apprenticeship in a business, craft or art or what Prof. Mures calls 'an initiation into a higher culture '. Neither the crushing of untouchability nor the refusal of personal growth was necessary inherent in slavery, especially

slavery as it existed in Roman Empire. It is therefore over hasty to say that slavery is better than untouchability.

This training, this initiation of culture was undoubtedly a great benefit to the slave. Equally it involved considerable cost to the master to train his slave, to initiate him into culture. 'There can have been little supply of slaves educated or trained before enslavement. The alternative was to train them when young slaves in domestic work or in skilled craft, as was indeed done to some extent before the Empire, by Cato, the Elder, for example. The training was done by his owner and his existing staff.... indeed the household of the rich contained special pedagogue for this purpose. Such training took many forms, industry, trade, arts and letters '.

The reason why the master took so much trouble to train the slave and to initiate him in the higher forms of labour and culture was undoubtedly the motive of gain. A skilled slave as an item was more valuable than an unskilled slave. If sold, he would fetch better price, if hired out he would bring in more wages. It was therefore an investment to the owner to train his slave.

In an un-free social order, such as slavery, the duty to maintain the slave in life and the body falls upon the master. The slave was relieved of all responsibility in respect of his food, his clothes and his shelter. All this, the master was bound to provide. This was, of course, no burden because the slave earned more than his keep. But a security for boarding and lodging is not always possible for every freeman, as all wage earners now know to their cost. Work is not always available even to those who are ready to toil and a workman cannot escape the rule according to which he gets no bread if he finds no work. This rule—no work no bread—has no applicability to the slave. It is the duty of the master to find bread and also to find work. If the master fails to find work, the slave does not forfeit his right to bread. The ebbs and tides of business, the booms and depressions are vicissitudes through which all free wage earners have to go. But they do not affect the slave. They may affect his master. But the slave is free from them. He gets his bread, perhaps the same bread, but bread whether it is boom or whether it is depression.

In an un-free social order, such as slavery, the master is bound to take great care of the health and well being of the slave: The slave was property of the master. But this very disadvantage gave the slave an advantage over a freeman. Being property and therefore valuable, the master for sheer self-interest took great care of the health and well-being of the slave In Rome, the slaves were never employed on marshy and malarial land. On such a land only freemen were employed. Cato advises Roman farmers never to employ slaves on marshy and malarial land. This seems strange. But a little examination will show that this was quite natural. Slave was valuable property

and as such a prudent man who knows his interest will not expose his valuable possession to the ravages of malaria. The same care need not be taken in the case of freeman because he is not valuable property. This consideration resulted into the great advantage of the slave. He was cared for as no one was.

Untouchability has none of the three advantages of the un-free social order mentioned above. The Untouchable has no entry in the higher arts of civilisation and no way open to a life of culture. He must only sweep. He must do nothing else. Untouchability carries no security as to livelihood. None from the Hindus is responsible for the feeding, housing and clothing of the Untouchable. The health of the Untouchable is the care of nobody. Indeed, the death of an Untouchable is regarded as a good riddance. There is a Hindu proverb, which says 'The Untouchable is dead and the fear of pollution has vanished '.

On the other hand, untouchability has all the disadvantages of a free social order. In a free social order the responsibility for survival in the struggle for existence lies on the individual. This responsibility is one of the greatest disadvantages of a free social order. Whether an individual is able to carry out this responsibility depends upon fair start, equal opportunity and square deal. The Untouchable, while he is a free individual, had neither fair start, nor equal opportunity nor square deal. From this point of view, untouchability is not only worse than slavery but is positively cruel as compared to slavery. In slavery, the master has the obligation to find work for the slave. In a system of free labour workers have to compete with workers for obtaining work. In this scramble for work what chances has the Untouchable for a fair deal? To put it shortly, in this competition with the scales always weighing against him by reason of his social stigma he is the last to be employed and the first to be fired. Untouchability is cruelty as compared to slavery because it throws upon the Untouchables the responsibility for maintaining himself without opening to him fully all the ways of earning a living.

To sum up, the Untouchables unlike the slaves are owned by the Hindus for purposes which further their interests and are disowned by them, when owning them places them under burden. The Untouchables can claim none of the advantages of an un-free social order and are left to bear all the disadvantages of a free social order.

CHAPTER 4

THE INDIAN GHETTO—THE CENTRE OF UNTOUCHABILITY— Outside the Fold

What is the position of the Untouchables under the Hindu social order? To give a true idea of their position is the main purpose of this chapter. But it is not easy to strike upon the best means of conveying a realistic and concrete picture of the way the Untouchables live or rather are made to live under the Hindu social order to one who has no conception of it. One way is to draw a model plant so to say of the Hindu social order and show the place given to the Untouchables therein. For this it is necessary to go to a Hindu village. Nothing can serve our purpose better. The Hindu village is a working plant of the Hindu social order. One can see there the Hindu social order in operation in full swing. The average Hindu is always in ecstasy whenever he speaks of the Indian village. He regards it as an ideal form of social organisation to which he believes there is no parallel anywhere in the world. It is claimed to be a special contribution to the theory of social organisation for which India may well be proud of.

How fanatic are the Hindus in their belief in the Indian village as an ideal piece of social organisation may be seen from the angry speeches made by the Hindu members of the Indian Constituent Assembly in support of the contention that the Indian Constitution should recognise the Indian village as its base of the constitutional pyramid of autonomous administrative units with its own legislature, executive and judiciary. From the point of view of the Untouchables, there could not have been a greater calamity. Thank God the Constituent Assembly did not adopt it. Nevertheless the Hindus persist in their belief that the Indian village is an ideal form of social organisation. This belief of the Hindus is not ancestral belief, nor does it come from the ancient past. It is borrowed from Sir Charles Metcalfe—a civil servant of the East India Company. Metcalfe, who was a revenue officer, in one of his Revenue Papers described the Indian village in the following terms¹:

"The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last when nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down, revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Moghul, Maratha, Sikh, English, all are masters in turn, but the village communities remain the same. In times of trouble they arm and fortify themselves. An hostile army passes through the country, the village communities collect their cattle within their walls and let the enemy pass unprovoked. If plunder and devastation be directed against them selves, and the forces employed be irresistible, they flee to friendly villages at a distance; but when the storm has passed over, they return and resume their occupations. If a country remains for a series of years the scene of continued pillage and massacre so that the villages cannot be inhabited, the scattered villagers nevertheless return whenever the power

of peaceable possession revives. A generation may pass away, but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the place of their fathers; the same site for the village, the same position for their houses, the same lands will be reoccupied by the descendants of those who were driven out when the village was repopulated; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them out, for they will often maintain their post through times of disturbances and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success. This union of the village communities, each one forming a little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India, through all the revolutions and changes which they have referred, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence." Having read this description of an Indian village given by a high-placed member of the governing class, the Hindus felt flattered and adopted his view as a welcome compliment. In adopting this view of the Indian village, the Hindus have not done any justice to their intelligence or their understanding. They have merely exhibited the weakness common to all subject people. Since many foreigners are led to accept this idealistic view of the Indian village, it would be better to present a realistic picture of the Society as one finds it in an Indian village.

The Indian village is not a single social unit. It consists of castes. But for our purposes, it is enough to say—

1. The population in the village is divided into two sections—(I) Touchables and (ii) Untouchables.

II. The Touchables form the major community and the Untouchables a minor community.

III. The Touchables live inside the village and the Untouchables live outside the village in separate quarters.

IV. Economically, the Touchables form a strong and powerful community, while the Untouchables are a poor and a dependent community.

V. Socially, the Touchables occupy the position of a ruling race, while the Untouchables occupy the position of a subject race of hereditary bondsmen.

What are the terms of associated life on which the Touchables and Untouchables live in an Indian village? In every village the Touchables have a code which the Untouchables are required to follow. This code lays down the acts of omissions and commissions which the Touchables treat as offences. The following is the list of such offences:

1. The Untouchables must live in separate quarters away from the habitation of the Hindus. It is an offence for the Untouchables to break or evade the rule of segregation.

2. The quarters of the Untouchables must be located towards the South, since the South is the most inauspicious of the four directions. A breach of this rule shall be deemed to be an offence.

3. The Untouchable must observe the rule of distance pollution or shadow of pollution as the case may be. It is an offence to break the rule.

4. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to acquire wealth, such as land or cattle.

5. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to build a house with tiled roof.

6. It is an offence for a member of an Untouchable community to put on a clean dress, wear shoes, put on a watch or gold ornaments.

7. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to give high sounding names to their children. Their names be such as to indicate contempt.

8. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to sit on a chair in the presence of a Hindu.

9. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to ride on a horse or a palanquin through the village.

10. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to take a procession of Untouchables through the village.

11. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community not to salute a Hindu.

12. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to speak a cultured language.

13. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community, if he happens to come into the village on a sacred day which the Hindus treat as the day of fast and at or about the time of the breaking of fast, to go about speaking, on the ground that their breath is held to foul the air and the food of the Hindus.

14. It is an offence for an Untouchable to wear the outward marks of a Touchable and pass himself as a Touchable.

15. An Untouchable must conform to the status of an inferior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as— (a) having a contemptible name. (b) not wearing clean clothes. (c) not having tiled roof. (d) not wearing silver and gold ornaments. A contravention of any of these rules is an offence. Next come the duties which the Code requires members of the Untouchable community to perform for the Touchables. Under this head the following may be mentioned:

1. A member of an Untouchable community must carry a message of any event in the house of a Hindu such as death or marriage to his relatives living in other villages no matter how distant these villages may be.

2. An Untouchable must work at the house of a Hindu when a marriage is taking place, such as breaking fuel, and going on errands.

3. An Untouchable must accompany a Hindu girl when she is going from her parent's house to her husband's village no matter how distant it is.

4. When the whole village community is engaged in celebrating a general festivity such as Holi or Dasara, the Untouchables must perform all menial acts which are preliminary to the main observance.

5. On certain festivities, the Untouchables must submit their women to members of the village community to be made the subject of indecent fun. These duties have to be performed without remuneration.

To realise the significance of these duties, it is important to note why they have come into being. Every Hindu in the village regards himself as a superior person above the Untouchables. As an overlord, he feels it absolutely essential to maintain his prestige. This prestige he cannot maintain unless he has at his command a retinue to dance attendance on him. It is in the Untouchable that he finds a ready retinue, which is at his command and for which he does not have to pay. The Untouchables by reason of their helplessness cannot refuse to perform these duties and the Hindu villager does not hesitate to exact them since they are so essential to the maintenance of his prestige.

These offences are not to be found in the Penal Code, enacted by the British Government. Nonetheless so far as the Untouchables are concerned, they are real. A breach of any of them involves sure punishment for the Untouchables. How they are enforced will be clear from Chapter 5 & 6.

Another important thing to note is that the punishment for these offences is always collective. The whole community of Untouchables is liable for punishment though the offence may have been committed by an individual.

How do the Untouchables live? How do they earn their living? Without a knowledge of the ways of earning a livelihood which are open to the Untouchables it would not be possible to have a clear idea of their place in the Hindu Society.

In an agricultural country, agriculture can be the main source of living. But this source of earning a living is generally not open to the Untouchables. This is so for a variety of reasons. In the first place purchase of land is beyond their means. Secondly even if an Untouchable has the money to purchase land he has no opportunity to do so. In most parts the Hindus would resent an Untouchable coming forward to purchase land and thereby trying to become

the equal of the Touchable class of Hindus. Such an act of daring on the part of an Untouchable would not only be frowned upon but might easily invite punishment. In some parts they are disabled by law from purchasing land. For instance in the Province of Punjab there is a law called the Land Alienation Act. This law specifies the communities which can purchase land and the Untouchables are excluded from the list. The result is that in most part the Untouchables are forced to be landless labourers. As labourers they cannot demand reasonable wages. They have to work for the Hindu farmer for such wages as their masters choose to give. On this issue the Hindu farmers can combine to keep the wages to the lowest level possible for it is to their interests to do so. On the other hand the Untouchables have no holding power. They must earn or starve. Nor have they any bargaining power. They must submit to the rate fixed or suffer violence.

The wages paid to the Untouchables are either paid in cash or in corn. In parts of the Uttar Pradesh the corn given to the Untouchables as their wages is called "Gobaraha". "Gobaraha" means privy corn or corn contained in the dung of an animal. In the month of March or April when the crop is fully grown, reaped and dried, it is spread on the threshing floor. Bullocks are made to tread over the corn in order to take the corn out of husk by the pressure of their hooves. While treading over the corn, the bullocks swallow up the corn as well as the straw. As their intake is excessive they find it difficult to digest the corn. Next day, the same corn comes out of their stomach along with their dung: The dung is strained and the corn is separated and given to the Untouchable workmen as their wages which they convert into flour and make into bread.

When the agricultural season is over the Untouchables have no employment and no means of earning a living. In such seasons they subsist by cutting grass and firewood from the jungle and sell it in a nearby town. Even when it is open it depends upon the forest guard. Only if he is bribed he will let them take some grass and firewood from the Government forest. When it is brought to the town they have always to face a buyer's market. The Hindus who are the main body of buyers will always conspire to beat down the wages. Having no power to hold out, the Untouchables have to sell their stuff for whatever is offered to them. Often times they have to walk 10 miles each way from the village to the town and back to sell their stuff.

There is no trade in which they are engaged themselves as a means of earning a livelihood. They have not the capital for it and even if they had, no one would buy from them.

All these sources of earning are obviously precarious and fleeting. There is no security. There is only one secure source of livelihood open to the

Untouchables *in* some parts of the country known to me. It is the right—to beg food from the Hindu farmers of the village. Every village has its machinery of administration. The Untouchables of the village are hereditary menials employed in the village administration. As part of their remuneration the whole body of Untouchables get a small parcel of land assigned in the ancient past which is fixed and is never increased and which the Untouchables prefer to leave uncultivated because of its excessive fragmentation. Coupled with this is given to them the right to beg for food.

Shocking as it may seem, this has become a customary right of the Untouchables and even Government takes into account the value of the food obtained by the Untouchables by begging in fixing the remuneration of an Untouchable if he were to be employed in Government job.

This right to beg for food from the Touchables is now the principal means of livelihood for 60 millions of Untouchables in India. If anyone were to move in a village after the usual dinner time, he will meet with a swarm of Untouchables moving about the village begging for food and uttering the formula.

This statutory beggary as a means of livelihood for the Untouchables has been reduced to a system. The Untouchable families are attached to different Touchable families in the village as did the serfs and villains to the Lords of the Manors in Medieval Europe. The Untouchable families attached to the Touchable families are at the command of the latter. This relationship has become so personal that one always hears a Touchable speaking of an Untouchable as 'my man ' as though he was his slave. This relationship has helped to systematise this matter of begging food by the Untouchables from the Touchable households.

This is the Village Republic of which the Hindus are so proud. What is the position of the Untouchables in this Republic? They are not merely the last but are also the least. He is stamped as an inferior and is held down to that status by all ways and means, which a majority can command. This inferiority is the destiny not merely of an individual but of the whole class. All Untouchables are inferior to all Touchables irrespective of age or qualification. A Touchable youth is above an aged Untouchable and an educated Untouchable must rank below an illiterate Touchable.

The established order is the law made by the Touchables. The Untouchables have nothing to do with it except to obey it and respect it.

The Untouchables have no rights against the Touchables. For them there is no equal right, no justice by which that which is due to the Untouchables is allowed to them. Nothing is due to them except what the Touchables are prepared to grant. The Untouchables must not insist on rights. They should pray for mercy and favour and rest content with what is offered.

This established order is a hereditary order both in status as well as in function. Once a Touchable, always a Touchable. Once an Untouchable, always an Untouchable. Once a Brahmin, always a Brahmin. Once a sweeper, always a sweeper. Under it, those who are born high, remain high; those who are born low, remain low. In other words, the established order is based on an inexorable law of karma or destiny, which is fixed once for all and can never be changed. This destiny has no relation to the merits of the individuals living under it. An Untouchable however superior he may be mentally and morally, is below a Touchable in rank, no matter how inferior he may be mentally or morally. A Touchable however poor he may be must always take rank above an Untouchable, however rich he may be.

Such is the picture of the inside life in an Indian village. In this Republic, there is no place for democracy. There is no room for equality. There is no room for liberty and there is no room for fraternity. The Indian village is the very negation of a Republic. If it is a republic, it is a republic of the Touchables, by the Touchables and for the Touchables. The republic is an Empire of the Hindus over the Untouchables. It is a kind of colonialism of the Hindus designed to exploit the Untouchables. The Untouchables have no rights. They are there only to wait, serve and submit. They are there to do or to die. They have no rights because they are outside the village republic and because they are outside the so-called republic, they are outside the Hindu fold. This is a vicious circle. But this is a fact which cannot be gainsaid.

CHAPTER 5

UNFIT FOR HUMAN ASSOCIATION

The Untouchables as explained in the last Chapter are outside the Hindu fold. The question however remains How far removed are they from the Hindus? What respect, what consideration do the Hindus show to them as human beings if not as Hindus? Without an answer to these questions, one cannot get a complete picture of the life of the Untouchables. The answer is there for anyone who cares to note it. The only difficulty is how to present it. There are two ways of presenting it. Either in the form of a statement or by citation of cases. I will adopt the latter. I do not wish to weary the reader with many cases. I will cite only a few, which are quite telling. The first case is from the State of Madras. In the year 1909 an appeal was filed in the Madras High Court by Mr. Venkata Subba Reddy and others all of whom were Hindus against their conviction by the Magistrate under section 339, Indian Penal Code, for causing obstruction to the complainant and his party who were also caste Hindus. The judgment of the Madras High Court which gives the facts

of the case and illustrates the position of the Untouchables vis-à-vis the Hindus in a very striking manner. The judgement is therefore worth quoting. It is as follows:

"The Appellants (Venkata Subba Reddy and others) have been convicted of wrongful restraint for having caused certain Pariahs² to stand in the public street in the vicinity of a temple with the object of preventing the complainant from conducting a procession from the temple through the street. It is found that the complainant, deterred by fear of the pollution which he would have suffered had he passed near the *Pariahs*, did not conduct the procession, and that the accused maliciously caused the *Pariahs* to take up their positions in the street with the sole object of deterring the complainant from going where he had a right to go.

We do not think that the accused has committed the offence of wrongful restraint; in our opinion this act did not amount to an obstruction within the meaning of section 339. The Pariahs were no obstruction; in fact there was nothing to prevent the complainant from taking his procession past them and they had a right to be where they were; and it is not suggested that their presence was intended to cause fear of physical injury or any fear that anything would happen to the complainant except the pollution of the procession by their presence.

It was not the presence of the *Pariahs* but the complainant's own disinclination to go near them which prevented him from going where he would; it was his own choice which kept him from leaving the temple as Mr. Kuppuswami Aiyer put it, it was with his own consent that he remained there and there was no fear of injury within the meaning of the Penal Code which would prevent that consent from being a free consent. If it were otherwise, it would follow that a person in the position of the complainant would be justified in complaining of wrongful restraint against any *Pariah*, who having been lawfully in the public street on his own business, refused to move when directed to remove himself to a distance, knowing that if he remained, the complainant would be deterred by fear of pollution from passing near him.

It is clear that there would be no wrongful restraint in such a case and we think, it makes no difference that the *Pariahs* were posted by the accused.

We therefore set aside the conviction and sentence and direct refund of the fines if paid."

The case is very illuminating. There were in this case two parties. Venkata Subba Reddy was the leader of one party. Both parties were caste Hindus. The quarrel between the parties was over the right to take out a procession. Venkata Subba Reddy wanted to stop his opponents from taking out a procession and did not know how best to do it. It struck him that the effective

way would be to get a few Untouchables and ask them to stand on the road and hold fast to it. The trick succeeded and his opponents could not dare to go in the procession for fear of being polluted. The fact that the Madras High Court gave a judgment to the effect that making the *Pariahs* stand on the road does not constitute obstruction in the legal sense of the term is another matter. The fact remains that the mere presence of the *Pariahs* was enough to drive the Hindus away. What does this mean? It means that the Hindus have an absolute feeling of revulsion towards the Untouchables.

The next case is equally illuminating. It is a case of an Untouchable school teacher in a village in Kathiavar and is reported in the following letter which appeared in the '*Young India*' a journal published by Mr. Gandhi in its issue of 12th December 1929. It expresses the difficulties he had expressed in persuading a Hindu doctor to attend to his wife who had just delivered and how the wife and child died for want of medical attention. The letter says:

" On the 5th of this month a child was born to me. On the 7th, she fell ill and suffered from loose stools. Her vitality seemed to ebb away and her chest became inflamed. Her breathing became difficult and there was acute pain in the ribs. I went to call doctor—but he said he would not go to the house of a Harijan nor was he prepared to examine the child. Then I went to Nagarseth and Garasia Darbar and pleaded them to help me. The Nagarseth stood surety to the doctor for my paying his fee of two rupees. Then the doctor came but on condition that he would examine them only outside the Harijan colony. I took my wife out of the colony along with her newly born child. Then the doctor gave his thermometer to a Muslim, he gave it to me and I gave it to my wife and then returned it by the same process after it had been applied. It was about eight o'clock in the evening and the doctor on looking at the thermometer in the light of a lamp said that the patient was suffering from pneumonia. Then the doctor went away and sent the medicine. I brought some linseed from the bazaar and used it on the patient. The doctor refused to see her later, although I gave the two rupees fee. The disease is dangerous and God alone will help us.

The lamp of my life has died out. She passed away at about two o'clock this afternoon."

The name of the Untouchable schoolteacher is not given. So also the name of the doctor is not mentioned. This was at the request of the Untouchable teacher who feared reprisals. The facts are indisputable.

No explanation is necessary. The doctor, who in spite of being educated refused to apply the thermometer and treat an ailing woman in a critical condition. As a result of his refusal to treat her, the woman died. He felt no qualms of conscience in setting aside the code of conduct, which is binding

on his profession. The Hindu would prefer to be inhuman rather than touch an Untouchable. The third case is taken from "*Prakash*" of 23rd August 1932:

" In the village of Jagwal, tahsil Jafarwal on the 6th August, a calf fell into a well. Rammahashaya, a Dom by caste was standing nearby. He at once jumped into the well and caught the calf in his arms. On three or four men coming to help, the calf was safely rescued from the well..

The Hindus of the village, however, raised a hue and cry that their well had been defiled and victimised the poor man. Fortunately, a barrister had come to the scene. He soundly rebuked the men who were tormenting Sadharam and thus brought them to their senses. Thus, the man's life was saved otherwise no one knows what might have happened."

What is important: saving of the calf by the Untouchable and his polluting the well or the death of the calf and saving the well from being polluted by the Untouchable? From the point of view of the Hindus, it would be better if the calf had died than an Untouchable even for the purpose of saving the calf should have polluted the well.

Another case of similar sort is reported in the '*Bombay Samachar*' of 19th December 1936:

" In Kaladi, a village of Calicut, the child of a young woman fell into a well. The woman raised an alarm but none present dared to go down the well. A stranger who was passing by jumped into the well and rescued the child. Later, when the people asked the benefactor who he was, he said, he was an Untouchable. Thereupon instead of being thankful, the man was fully abused and assaulted as he had polluted the well."

How unclean and unfit for association an Untouchable is to a Hindu be evident from the following incident reported in the '*Adi Hindu*' of Lucknow for July 1937: It says:

" An employee of the Madras Holmes Company, who claimed to be one of the high caste persons, passed away recently. When at the cremation ground his pyre was set fire to, his friends and kinsmen threw rice on it. Among these friends unfortunately there was an Untouchable, an Adi-Dravida of Madras. He also joined in the throwing of the rice. At this, the high caste Hindus rebuked him for defiling the pyre. This led on to a heated argument and the upshot was that two men were stabbed in the stomach, one of them died at once upon reaching the hospital and the condition of the other one is said to be critical."

There is one other incident more telling than this. On the 6th of March 1938, a meeting of the Bhangis was held at Kasarwadi (behind Woollen Mills)

Dadar, Bombay, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Indulal Yadnik. In this meeting, one Bhangi boy narrated his experience in the following terms:

"I passed the Vernacular Final Examination in 1933. I have studied English up to the 4th Standard. I applied to the Schools Committee of the Bombay Municipality for employment as a teacher but I failed, as there was no vacancy. Then, I applied to the Backward Classes Officer, Ahmedabad, for the job of a Talati (village Patwari) and I succeeded. On 19th February 1936, I was appointed a Talati in the office of the Mamlatdar of the Borsad Taluka in the Kheda District.

Although my family originally came from Gujarat, I had never been in Gujarat before. This was my first occasion to go there. Similarly, I did not know that untouchability would be observed in Government offices. Besides in my application the fact of my being a Harijan was mentioned and so I expected that my colleagues in the office would know before-hand who I was. That being so, I was surprised to find the attitude of the clerk of the Mamlatdar's office when I presented myself to take charge of the post of the Talati.

The Karkun contemptuously asked, " Who are you ? " I replied, " Sir, I am a Harijan "; He said, ' Go away, stand at a distance. How dare you stand so near me. You are in office, if you were outside I would have given you six kicks, what audacity to come here for service! " Thereafter, he asked me to drop on the ground my certificate and the order of appointment as a Talati. He then picked them up. While I was working in the Mamlatdar's office at Borsad I experienced great difficulty in the matter of getting water for drinking. In the verandah of the office there were kept cans containing drinking water. There was a waterman in-charge of these water cans. His duty was to pour out water to clerks in office whenever they needed it. In the absence of the waterman they could themselves take water out of the cans and drink it. That was impossible in my case. I could not touch the cans for my touch would pollute the water, I had therefore to depend upon the mercy of the water-man. For my use there was kept a small rusty pot. No one would touch it or wash it except myself. It was in this pot that the waterman would dole out water to me. But I could get water only if the waterman was present. This waterman did not like the idea of supplying me with water. Seeing that I was coming for water he would manage to slip away with the result that I had to go without water and the days on which I had no water to drink were by no means few.

I had the same difficulties regarding my residence. I was a stranger in Borsad. No caste Hindu would rent a house to me. The Untouchables of Borsad were not ready to give me lodgings for the fear of displeasing the Hindus who did not like my attempt to live as a clerk, a station above me. Far

greater difficulties were with regard to food. There was no place or person from where I could get my meals. I used to buy 'Bhajhas' morning and evening, eat them in some solitary place outside the village and come and sleep at night, on the pavement of the verandahs of the Mamlatdar's office. In this way, I passed four days. All this became unbearable to me. Then I went to live at Jentral, my ancestral village. It was six miles from Borsad. Every day I had to walk eleven miles. This I did for a month and a half.

Thereafter the Mamlatdar sent me to a Talati to learn the work. This Talati was -in charge of three villages, Jentral, Khapur and Saijpur. Jentral was his headquarters. I was in Jentral with this Talati for two months. He taught me nothing and I never once entered the village office. The headman of the village was particularly hostile. Once he had said 'you fellow, your father, your brother are sweepers who sweep the village office and you want to sit in the office as our equal? Take care, better give up this job.'

One day the Talati called me to Saijpur to prepare the population table of the village. From Jentral I went to Saijpur. I found the Headman and the Talati in the village office doing some work. I went, stood near the door of the office and wished them 'good morning ' but they took no notice of me. I stood outside for about 15 minutes. I was already tired of life and felt enraged at being thus ignored and insulted. I sat down on a chair that was lying there. Seeing me seated on the chair the Headman and the Talati quietly went away without saying anything to me. A short while after, people began to come and soon a large crowd gathered round me. This crowd was led by the Librarian of the village library. I could not understand why an educated person should have led this mob. I subsequently learnt that the chair was his. He started abusing me in the worst terms. Addressing the Ravana (village servant) he said 'who allowed this dirty 'dog of a Bhangi to sit on the chair?' The Ravana unseated me and took away the chair from me. I sat on the ground. Thereupon the crowd entered the village office and surrounded me. It was a furious crowd raging with anger, some abusing me, some threatening to cut me to pieces with Dharya (a sharp weapon like the sword). I implored them to excuse me and to have mercy upon me. That did not have any effect upon the crowd. I did not know how to save myself. But an idea came to me of writing to the Mamlatdar about the fate that had befallen me and telling him how to dispose of my body in case I was killed by the crowd. Incidentally, it was my hope that if the crowd came to know that I was practically reporting against them to the Mamlatdar they might hold their hands. I asked the Ravana to give me a piece of paper which he did. Then with my fountain pen I wrote the following on it in big bold letters so that everybody could read it:

"To
The Mamlatdar, Taluk Borsad.

Sir,

Be pleased to accept the humble salutations of Parmar Kalidas Shivram. This is to humbly inform you that the hand of death is falling upon me today. It would not have been so if I had listened to the words of my parents. Be so good as to inform my parents of my death. "

The Librarian read what I wrote and at once asked me to tear it off, which I did. They showered upon me innumerable insults. 'You want us to address you as our Talati? You are a Bhangi and you want to enter the office and sit on the chair? 'I implored for mercy and promised not to repeat this and also promised to give up the job. I was kept there till seven in the evening when the crowd left. Till then the Talati and the Mukhiya had not come. Thereafter I took fifteen days' leave and returned to my parents in Bombay." There is another facet of the social outlook of the Hindus towards the Untouchables, which cannot be neglected. This outlook is best illustrated by a study of the following cases. In the ' *Alfzal* ' of 8th September 1943:

" It was reported from Nasik on 1st September that the Hindus of a village attacked an Achchut family; tied the hands and feet of an elderly woman, placed her on a pile of wood which was subsequently set on fire. All this because they thought she was the cause of the Cholera in the village." The '*Times of India*' of August 29, 1946.

"The Harijan quarters of a village in Kaira District are reported to have been raided by Caste Hindus on suspicion that the Harijans were causing the death of cattle by witchcraft.

It is alleged that about 200 villagers armed with sticks raided the Harijan quarters and tying an old woman to a tree, burnt her feet. Another woman is reported to have been belaboured.

The Harijans evacuated the village in panic, but Mr. Chhotabhai Patel, Secretary of the District Harijan Sevak Sangh who was apprized of the incidents has brought back the Harijans to the village and applied to the authorities for their protection.

A similar incident is reported from another village, where Harijans are alleged to have been severely belaboured." The matter did not end there. There was a recurrence of violence in which the whole body of Hindus are reported to have taken part in general assault on the Untouchables. The news appeared in the ' *Bharat Jyoti* ' of 22nd September 1946. which is reproduced below:

"Five Harijans, including one woman, were injured seriously when a crowd of villagers attacked them with dharias and lathis in a village in Borsad Taluka in Kaira District according to a report received by the Secretary of the Borsad Taluka Harijan Sevak Sangh. The attack was a sequel to the death of about seven buffaloes which the villagers attributed to black magic practised by the Harijans.

The injured have been sent to hospital. Police rushed to the spot, and some persons have been arrested.

The villagers, it is learnt, are threatening the Harijans that if they make any complaints to the authorities they would be burnt alive.

Such incidents often occur in Kaira villages, and the District Magistrate of Kaira has instructed all police and other executive officers to take strong measures against such harassment of Harijans."

The tale told by these cases is clear and simple. No comment is necessary. To the average Hindu, the Untouchable is not fit even for human association. He is the carrier of evil. He is not a human being. He must be shunned.

PART II